

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF WEST VIRGINIA**

**GARY LYNN PALMER,**

**Plaintiff,**

**v.**

**CIVIL ACTION NO. 2:08cv89  
(Judge Maxwell)**

**GEORGE TRENT, North Central Regional Jail Administrator;  
IMPROPER TRAINED NURSES (ALL),**

**Defendants.**

**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

On August 28, 2008, the plaintiff initiated this civil action. On that same date, the plaintiff was issued a Deficiency Notice. On September 9, 2008, the plaintiff paid the \$350.00 filing fee. This matter is before the undersigned for an initial review and report and recommendation pursuant to LR PL P 83.01 and 28 U.S.C. §1915(e) and 1915A.

**I. THE COMPLAINT**

The plaintiff was an inmate incarcerated at the North Central Regional Jail (“NCRJ”). The plaintiff alleges that his claim is “as clear as the nose on a mans (sic) face.” Specifically, the plaintiff alleges a prima facie case of negligence with regard to health and hygiene at the NCRJ. In support of his claim, the plaintiff alleges that he was arrested on December 8, 2007 and was lodged at the NCRJ. He maintains that he suffered a staphylococcus skin infection in late December 2006. He further maintains that he suffered additional staphylococcus infections in March of 2008, May of 2008, June of 2008, and July of 2008. The plaintiff alleges that he never once received proper medical attention for these infections. The plaintiff maintains that he could not avoid contracting the infections due to the negligent habits of his captors. As relief, the plaintiff appears to seek \$1,000,000 in damages. In addition, he

appears to request an order that the staff at the NCRJ practice healthy hygiene and sanitation and that the nurses and visiting doctors be instructed to practice preventive care.

## **II. STANDARD OF REVIEW**

Because plaintiff is a prisoner seeking redress from a governmental entity or employee, the Court must review the complaint to determine whether it is frivolous or malicious. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b), the Court is required to perform a judicial review of certain suits brought by prisoners and must dismiss a case at any time if the Court determines that the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief. Complaints which are frivolous or malicious, must be dismissed. 28 U.S.C. 1915(e).

A complaint is frivolous if it is without arguable merit either in law or fact. Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 325. However, the Court must read *pro se* allegations in a liberal fashion. Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972). A complaint filed *in forma pauperis* which fails to state a claim under Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6) is not automatically frivolous. See Neitzke at 328. Frivolity dismissals should only be ordered when the legal theories are “indisputably meritless,” Id. at 327.

## **III. ANALYSIS**

### **A. Medical Negligence**

To establish a medical negligence claim in West Virginia, the plaintiff must prove:

- (a) the health care provider failed to exercise that degree of care, skill, and learning required or expected of a reasonable, prudent health care provider in the profession or class to which the health care provider belongs acting in the same or similar circumstances; and
- (b) such failure was a proximate cause of the injury or death.

W.Va. Code § 55-7B-3. When a medical negligence claim involves an assessment of whether the

plaintiff was properly diagnosed and treated and/or whether the health care provider was the proximate cause of the plaintiff's injuries, expert testimony is required. Banfi v. American Hospital for Rehabilitation, 529 S.E.2d 600, 605-606 (2000).

Additionally, under West Virginia law, certain requirements must be met before a health care provider may be sued. W.Va. Code §55-7B-6. This section provides in pertinent part:

**§ 55-7B-6. Prerequisites for filing an action against a health care provider; procedures; sanctions**

(a) Notwithstanding any other provision of this code, no person may file a medical professional liability action against any health care provider without complying with the provisions of this section.

(b) At least thirty days prior to the filing of a medical professional liability action against a health care provider, the claimant shall serve by certified mail, return receipt requested, a notice of claim on each health care provider the claimant will join in litigation. The notice of claim shall include a statement of the theory or theories of liability upon which a cause of action may be based, and a list of all health care providers and health care facilities to whom notices of claim are being sent, together with a screening certificate of merit. The screening certificate of merit shall be executed under oath by a health care provider qualified as an expert under the West Virginia rules of evidence and shall state with particularity: (1) The expert's familiarity with the applicable standard of care in issue; (2) the expert's qualifications; (3) the expert's opinion as to how the applicable standard of care was breached; and (4) the expert's opinion as to how the breach of the applicable standard of care resulted in injury or death. A separate screening certificate of merit must be provided for each health care provider against whom a claim is asserted. The person signing the screening certificate of merit shall have no financial interest in the underlying claim, but may participate as an expert witness in any judicial proceeding. Nothing in this subsection may be construed to limit the application of rule 15 of the rules of civil procedure.

This Court previously held that compliance with W.Va. Code §55-7B-6 is mandatory prior to filing suit in federal court. See Stanley v. United States, 321 F.Supp.2d 805, 806-807 (N.D.W.Va.

2004).<sup>1</sup>

With regard to the appropriate standard of care, plaintiff has completely failed to sustain his burden of proof. Plaintiff does not assert, much less establish, the standard of care for the diagnosis or treatment of staphylococcus.<sup>2</sup> Under the circumstances of this case, plaintiff would be required to produce the medical opinion of a qualified health care provider in order to raise any genuine issue of material fact with respect to the defendants' breach of the duty of care. Moreover, there is nothing in the complaint which reveals that the plaintiff has met the requirements of W.Va. Code §55-7B-6. Accordingly, even if this court has supplemental jurisdiction over the plaintiff's state law claims for medical malpractice, summary dismissal is appropriate, and the only medical personnel named, "all nurses employed at the NCRJ should be dismissed.

**B. 42 U.S.C. § 1983**

Although not specifically articulated, a liberal reading of the plaintiff's complaint indicates that he may be attempting to state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 which provides as follows:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory or the District of Columbia, subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress, except that in any action brought against a judicial officer for an act or omission taken in such officer's judicial capacity,

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<sup>1</sup> In Stanley, the plaintiff brought suit against the United States alleging that the United States, acting through its employee healthcare providers, was negligent and deviated from the "standards of medical care" causing him injury.

<sup>2</sup> Although the plaintiff has submitted a 45 page treatise on the Management of Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) Infections, he has offered no pleadings, affidavits, or declarations from any medical professional that establishes that the NRJA breached any applicable community standards for the diagnosis or treatment of staphylococcus infections.

injunctive relief shall not be granted unless a declaratory decree was violated or declaratory relief was unavailable. For the purposes of this section, any Act of Congress applicable exclusively to the District of Columbia shall be considered to be a statute of the District of Columbia.

Therefore, in order to state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, the plaintiff must demonstrate that a person acting under color of state law deprived him of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution or federal laws. Rendall-Baker v. Kohn, 547 U.S. 830, 838 (1982).

## **1. George Trent**

In order to establish personal liability against a defendant in a § 1983 action, the defendant(s) must be personally involved in the alleged wrong(s); liability cannot be predicated solely under *respondeat superior*. See Monell v. Department of Social Services, 436 U.S. 658 (1978); Vinnedge v. Gibbs, 550 F.2d 926, 928 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1977). The plaintiff does not allege any personal involvement with his medical care by George Trent. Instead, he appears to allege that is responsible for the staff at the NCRJ and their actions. When a supervisor is not personally involved in the alleged wrongdoing, he may be liable under § 1983 if the subordinate acted pursuant to an official policy or custom which he is responsible, see Fisher v. Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, 690 F.2d 1113 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1982); Orum v. Haines, 68 F. Supp.2d 726 (D.D. W.Va. 1999), or the following elements are established: “(1) the supervisor had actual or constructive knowledge that his subordinate was engaged in conduct that posed a ‘pervasive and unreasonable risk’ of constitutional injury to citizens like the plaintiff; (2) the supervisor’s response to that knowledge was so inadequate as to show ‘deliberate indifference to or tacit authorization of the alleged offensive practices,’ and (3) there was an ‘affirmative causal link’ between the supervisor’s inaction and the particular constitutional injury suffered by the plaintiff.” Shaw v. Stroud, 13 F.3d 791, 799 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir.), *cert. denied*, 513 U.S. 813 (1994).

“Establishing a ‘pervasive’ and ‘unreasonable’ risk of harm requires evidence that the conduct is widespread, or at least has been used on several different occasions and that the conduct engaged in by the subordinate poses an unreasonable risk of harm or constitutional injury.” Id. “A plaintiff may establish deliberate indifference by demonstrating a supervisor’s ‘continued inaction in the face of documented widespread abuses.’” Id.

The plaintiff makes no allegations in his complaint which reveals the presence of the required elements for supervisory liability against Trent. Further, the undersigned notes that the Fourth Circuit has held that non-medical personnel may rely on the opinion of medical staff regarding the proper treatment of inmates. Miltier v. Beorn, 896 F.2d 848 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1990). Thus, Trent could rely on the opinion of the medical staff as to what medical care the plaintiff required for his alleged infections. Finally, the plaintiff’s sole allegation is negligence, which does not state a claim for a violation of the Eighth Amendment. Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976). Consequently, the undersigned finds that the plaintiff has failed to state a claim against Trent, and the complaint against him should be dismissed.

#### **IV. RECOMMENDATION**

In consideration of the foregoing, it is the undersigned’s recommendation that the complaint be **DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE** under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A and 1915(e) for failure to state a claim.

Any party may file within ten (10) days after being served with a copy of this Recommendation with the Clerk of the Court written objections identifying the portions of the Recommendation to which objections are made, and the basis for such objections. A copy of such objections should also be submitted to the Honorable Robert E. Maxwell, United States District Court. Failure to timely file

objections to the Recommendation set forth above will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of this Court based upon such Recommendation Failure to timely file objections to the Recommendation set forth above will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of this Court based upon such Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Thomas v. Arn, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985); United States v. Schronce, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984), cert. denied, 467 U.S. 1208 (1984).

The Clerk of the Court is directed to mail a copy of this Report and Recommendation to the *pro se* plaintiff by certified mail, return receipt requested, to his last known address as shown on the docket sheet.

DATED: February 24, 2009

/s/ James E. Seibert

JAMES E. SEIBERT

UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE